UNITED NATIONS

CRC

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/SR.512
21 January 1999

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Twentieth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 512th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 14 January 1999, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Miss MASON

CONTENTS

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (continued)

Initial report of Belize (continued)

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Official Records Editing Section, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

GE.99-40169 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Belize (continued) (CRC/C/3/Add.46; CRC/C/Q/BEL/1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Belize took places at the Committee table.

2. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to comment on the delegation's earlier remarks and ask questions concerning the definition of the child, general principles and civil rights and freedoms (questions 12 to 17 of the list of issues (CRC/C/Q/BEL/1)).

3. Mrs. SARDENBERG said she would like to know if there were any plans afoot to translate the Convention into Creole so as to cater for the vast majority of Belizeans who spoke neither Spanish nor English. She applauded the establishment of a focal point for non-governmental organizations (NGOs), thereby formalizing a mechanism for strengthening cooperation. She wondered, however, about its relationship to the mandate given to the Ministry of Human Development, Women and Youth to encourage development and rationalization among the NGOs themselves and between them and the Ministry and what contribution the NGOs had made to the preparation of the report.

4. Mrs. PALME said that the age of criminal responsibility was excessively low and should be raised. The age of marriage - based admittedly, on Belizean traditions - was also low and could be detrimental to the best interests of the girl child and, indeed, her health. She urged the Government to consider ways of discouraging early marriage, so as to give children time to develop a mature attitude to that institution.

5. Like Mrs. Sardenberg, she considered discriminatory the fact that children attending schools in remote areas might be denied access to the Convention if they understood neither Spanish nor English.

6. She had noted that, in addition to the 5 per cent official refugee figure, a further 10 per cent of the population consisted of illegal immigrants and included children, who were entitled to similar support. How did the Government of Belize, with its scant resources, plan to provide such support?

7. She wished to know what action the Government envisaged in order to attenuate the problem of absentee fathers - referred to as "visiting partners" - by enlightening them as to their paternal duties and the privileges of fatherhood. She also urged appropriate regulation of the situation of children that were abandoned when their parents went abroad to work or study. In that connection, she observed that adoption laws were in course of preparation and urged Belize to ratify the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, an important instrument for international cooperation among the signatories to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

8. Mrs. MOKHUANE, having commended the Belize authorities on their commitment to applying the provisions of the Convention and on the progress they had made with regard to child legislation, said she was concerned about the brain drain from Belize and wondered what efforts were being made to attract human resources from abroad. Moreover, given the country's limited resources, she wished to know what time frame was envisaged for implementing the proposals still pending and the establishment of a supervisory mechanism.

9. Mr. RABAH sought clarification of the precise types of employment for which legal minimum ages had been established and asked how enforcement of the legislation was monitored. He further inquired whether any children between the ages of 14 and 16 were currently in prison and what alternatives to imprisonment existed.

10. Mrs. KARP said that she, too, deplored the low minimum age for marriage, sexual consent and, in particular, criminal liability at the age of seven. It was not clear from the report whether there was any correlation between the age of deprivation of liberty and that of imprisonment. She wished to know the actual age at which children could be conscripted into the army, since the expression "at the Governor-General's discrimination" used in the initial report was very vague.

11. She stressed the importance of effective legislation so that medical and psychological counselling regarding drugs, sexual matters and AIDS could be given to children without parental involvement and of a monitoring mechanism to ensure that they were not exploited by charlatans. Ways should also be found to encourage children to confide in their parents where that was feasible.

12. In the Committee's view, discrimination transcended the forms actually enumerated in the Convention. Belize should thus concentrate on combating the de facto discrimination arising from unequal access in different parts of the country to the educational and health projects that served to empower children and must devise policies that placed the emphasis where it was most needed.

13. She would like to have some examples of how the courts interpreted the best interests of the child, not only in conflicts between parent and child but also when the child's own interests were in conflict. In that connection, she objected to the use of the word "welfare" in the report, as opposed to the "best interests of the child", which was the language of the Convention. "Welfare" was a somewhat patronizing term that implied mere care and protection, without consideration for the interests of an individual with rights.

14. There was some ambivalence in the new Belizean legislation on children. The proviso that the rights under the Convention would be enjoyed on condition that they accorded with the circumstances of Belize placed too heavy an onus on judges to decide which children's right did so. She therefore suggested that the child legislation be preceded by a general section in which not only children's basic rights but also the principles of the Convention were spelled out.

15. It was important that specific mention be made of the need to heed the wishes of children born out of wedlock as part of the decision-making process concerning them. Judges and care-givers should be urged to impart all relevant information to the child in question, so that he or she could take an informed decision about the future.

16. On the subject of participation, she encouraged the delegation to work towards the representation of children from all strata, the aim of the Convention being the empowerment of all children, regardless of their background.

17. Concerning the right of children to the integrity of their bodies, she regretted that corporal punishment had not been completely forbidden in the schools. Her main concern, however, was with corporal punishment in the home. In its determination to eradicate domestic violence, Belize must realize that that goal would not be attained so long as society justified the abuse of power and tolerated violence against children. The Committee felt that corporal punishment both in the home and at school violated many specific articles of the Convention as well as its general principles.

18. Most countries had had to overcome the resistance of parents and teachers who contended that corporal punishment was a valuable educational tool and had succeeded in helping such teachers and parents, and the community in general, to seek alternative measures. Belize might wish to seek assistance from countries that had already been successful in that endeavour.

19. Mr. FULCI said he hoped that the incredibly low age of seven for criminal liability would soon be raised. He wondered who was considered capable of judging the maturity of a child of seven or eight.

20. One of the basic general principles of the Convention was non-discrimination. Consequently, since the language of instruction was English in Belize, he wished to know what remedies were provided for the 23 per cent of the population who did not understand or speak that language.

21. In connection with civil rights and freedoms, he recommended an urgent revision of the Aliens Act so as to afford special protection for alien children who were in danger of expulsion or banishment. The Belize authorities should also look into the discrimination encountered by refugees and by the immigrant and indigenous populations, which was inevitably all the more acute in the case of children.

22. Mr. KOLOSOV, having praised the delegation for its high degree of professionalism, referred to a paragraph of the report in which the negative influence of the United States on young people was acknowledged (para. 301) and asked whether Belize was considering any plans to counteract that influence, especially in view of the likely expansion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

23. He also asked whether Belize had any plans to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the

Child and urged its authorities to inform the Secretary-General of their acceptance of the amendment to the Convention whereby the membership of the Committee would be increased from 10 to 18.

24. Mrs. PALME said that the issue of corporal punishment had to be dealt within all its aspects. Sweden had been the first country to pass a law against it, and the practice had declined every year since, thus showing that the law was being respected. Violence in society as a whole could not be dealt with if there were violence in the family, schools and institutions.

25. With regard to ratification by Belize of ILO Convention No. 138, on the minimum age for access to work, she pointed out that the International Labour Organization was currently drafting a new convention on hazardous work, which was also very important. Many children in Belize were dropping out of school and probably taking up some kind of work, which hindered their development and their future contribution to society.

26. Mrs. MOKHUANE said that the age of marriage for girls and the age of criminal responsibility were not in keeping with the emotional and physical development of the child. A 14-year-old was never ready to act as a woman and run a home and there were many problems in having sex early in life, both gynaecological and AIDS-related. Nor was a seven-year-old really able to distinguish between right and wrong; on the contrary, at that age a child was just beginning to learn to make the distinction.

27. There was also a discrepancy in the State party's intentions vis-à-vis the definition of the child. The Committee was assured in the initial report (para. 31) that the Government was conscious of the need to improve standardization of ages of majority and gender equity, whereas in its written replies to the Committee's questions (document without a symbol), the Government said that it had currently no plans to raise those minimum ages. That discrepancy was a matter of concern.

28. On the issue of non-discrimination, the State party's written replies to the list of issues referred to the steps the Government intended to take to combat school truancy and stated that a truancy programme would address the relatively large number of youth not attending school. She was concerned about the use of the word "truancy"; in cases where children were not in school, it seemed more appropriate to ask whether it was not the adults who were at fault in not supervising their children. Parents should play an active role in both education and upbringing.

29. According to the Government's written replies, a new Disability Act was pending. It would be interesting to hear what the current perceptions were in the community and civil society regarding disabilities. Did the Government have problems accommodating disabled children in the schools?

30. She wondered whether there were any incentives in place to promote the reporting of child abuse. While it was a good idea to have such a law, it could be enforced only if the members of the community were aware of their rights and the possibilities of redress. In the case of child abuse, for example, the question arose what would happen if the police was not sensitive to the issues.

31. Mrs. SARDENBERG asked for some clarification regarding the groups at risk of discrimination, particularly children with disabilities. What steps were being taken pending the adoption of the anti-discrimination act and what progress had been made in drafting it? The Government was attempting to bring children with disabilities into the mainstream, but there also seemed to be some problems of discrimination against, and lack of participation by, children from the Mayan- and Spanish-speaking populations. Children were also the victims of gender differences, girls because of the situation of women in general and boys because some laws on sexual assault did not include any protective measures for them.

32. According to the information received by the Committee, immigrants were also discriminated against, as were children in institutions, and there was alleged to be a certain amount of ethnic tension. The Certified Institutions (Children's Reformation) Act seemed to be in harmony with the Convention, but the report did not specify the duration of institutionalization. She wondered whether the Government had done any work in that regard and whether it had examined the situation of children in institutions to see if they were in fact the object of discrimination.

33. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said that there was no law to prevent discrimination against the disabled, and she wondered how the Government guaranteed their right to protection against all forms of discrimination. While the initial report stated that traditional and administrative procedures respected the child's views, there was no indication how the Government guaranteed that that right was respected in families, schools and institutions. The report mentioned certain actions taken in relation to children's participation in activities nationwide, but was that right respected in schools and at home?

34. The report acknowledged the need to take steps to respect the child's right to registration at birth (para. 56), but children without a birth certificate could not be registered at school. How, then, were they guaranteed their right to education, particularly if they were living in remote areas or were the children of illegal immigrants?

35. How did the Government guarantee the right of the child to a private life in family, school and institutions? Were there provisions for protecting children against information that could be considered harmful to their moral development or provide exposure to acts of violence? What was being done to reduce the negative impact of certain technological innovations, such as video films and electronic games? Were there any procedures for censorship? Had violence between children been included in the Government's proposals on violence in the family and corporal punishment?

36. Mrs. MBOI said that the promotion and protection of the rights of women went hand in hand with those of children. Paragraph 46 of the report, on the right to life, stated that abortion was unlawful. In such cases, the blame usually fell on the mother, and it was she who was punished, with a possible negative impact on any other children. She wished to know, therefore, what was being done to ensure fair treatment of such women and to ensure the best interests of their other children.

37. What precautions were taken to prevent child abusers from committing any further abuse and what was the role of social workers in that regard? How well paid were such workers, and what recognition did they receive from the Government and the community?

38. The CHAIRPERSON said that the age of criminal liability was a problem throughout the Caribbean and a throwback to its colonial past. She could not understand why the Governments of the region's English-speaking countries retained such an early age, as though it were a life-and-death matter. Instead of dealing with the recurrent antisocial behaviour of young people, they penalized them and introduced them to the criminal justice system at too early an age.

39. Ms. SHOMAN (Belize) said that, while most people in Belize spoke Creole, it was not a written language and translation of the Convention in a written form would be fraught with difficulties. The oral form of Creole, in which the Convention could be taught through such forms as play-acting, radio programmes and lectures to children, was much more useful.

40. Regarding the translation of the Convention into minority languages, a translation into Spanish already existed and a translation into Kek'chi Maya was under way. While Mopan Maya and Kek'chi Maya existed in written form most people were unable to read them, so the same situation applied as in the case of Creole: an oral form would be infinitely more useful. That also held true for the Garifuna and Mennonite communities, most of whom did not read their respective languages.

41. She took full responsibility for the statement in paragraph 30 of the report that "in several instances it may be deemed necessary to amend legislation to remove some apparent discrepancies regarding definitions". If the Attorney-General's Office had no plans to change certain ages, the Ministry of Human Development would exert pressure on it to do so. Draft legislation did exist which proposed that the legal minimum age of liability should be raised to age 10, at least. It was certainly true that some 10-year-olds understood perfectly well the import of what they were doing.

42. In any trial involving a child in the 7-to-12 age group, a voir dire (trial within a trial) was conducted by the judge in order to establish what the child's understanding was before making any ruling as to whether the child had the capacity even to give evidence, much less to stand trial. Judges were very conscious of the limitations of such children, and it was extremely rare for any child under the age of 12 to be tried in the criminal courts rather than the Family Court. In practice, Belizean legislation had not kept in step with the Government's policy and its judicial activism.

43. As to the Marriage Act, which was extremely old, the age of 14 was indeed low. The problem was not, so much, however, of 14-year-olds getting married, but of children of that age engaging in sexual activities and themselves having children. There were very few sectors of society that even believed in legal marriage. The Government was considering new legislation in that regard.

44. The age of sexual consent was addressed in the draft sexual offences act of which she herself and the Minister of Human Development had been the architects, but in which past administrations had taken no action. Molesting a child under the age of 10 was currently punishable by life imprisonment, while, in the case of a child aged between 10 and 12, the punishment was five years only. Furthermore, incest against boys was not actionable, and boy children were therefore discriminated against in that sense. The Ministry of Human Development, Women and Youth was painfully aware of all those problems, and the Minister had a personal stake in remedying them.

45. Mrs. BALDERAMOS GARCIA (Belize) said that Belize was in a unique situation with regard to immigrant, alien and refugee children. It had recently closed its refugee office, which had been opened during the 1980s to deal with the situation of conflict in Central America. That situation had been rectified but the immigrant situation had still not been resolved. The banana industry in the south of the country employed many immigrants, often migrant workers. Belize had a small population, and native Belizeans did not wish to work on the banana plantations.

46. Migrants from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador had children who were Belizean. They tended to be a strain on the social sector, although the Government had succeeded largely in mainstreaming them into the educational system. The challenge was to improve the social services and the education and health sectors so as to pay more attention to the children of immigrants.

47. Mr. DAKERS (Belize) said that, unlike most of its Central American neighbours, Belize, had allowed migrants to come in and live with the existing population and had not had to set up refugee camps. First-generation Belizean children, who had immersed themselves in the culture and spoke two languages, had been able to assimilate many of their parents' cultural traditions. There was some work still to be done, but over the past 10 years, many of the communities that had originally lived apart from the Belizeans had been integrated into existing communities, their children attending the same schools and using the same health services as the rest of the population.

48. The role of the NGO focal point within the Ministry of Human Development was to ensure that the NGO community had a window of access to the public sector. Prior to the establishment of the post, the NGO community had not always received due recognition of its excellent work, since national plans for development had been the domain of the public sector. It was not the role of the focal point to work on matters related to the Convention. The National Committee on Families and Children (NCFC) already had a fairly strong representation of NGOs, for example, on child abuse, family life, education, churches and business. The focal point post was designed to be more institutional and concerned with programme planning.

49. As to how the Government was reaching out to men in their role as fathers, Belizean men had come a long way, but the situation was still far from ideal, particularly with regard to fathers' responsibilities for their children: more than 75 per cent of the time of the Family Court was spent in dealing with fathers' failure to meet their financial commitments; it was a very serious problem. The Family Services Division of the Ministry of Human Development had done a great deal of work, but needed to cooperate with other

agencies and to look at existing legislation as it related to reciprocity in the case of those jurisdictions, such as the United States, to which some fathers have literally fled, and from which they could not be forced to send support.

50. Ms. BALDERAMOS GARCIA (Belize) said that an NGO, the Belize Family Life Association, offered counselling and health care for sexually-active adolescents. The utmost sensitivity was necessary in such matters, since churches of many denominations were very active in Belize and were concerned that moral and ethical values should be observed. The Declaration of Lima on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, for instance, contained a binding provision to make condoms readily available, but was phrased in such a way as to take cultural, religious, social and other concerns into account.

51. The situation of disabled children was receiving close attention; increased funding for the Human Development Department of the Ministry of Human Development, Women and Youth was making it possible more fully to identify and meet the needs of disabled children, introduce rehabilitation programmes and integrate children with less-serious disabilities into the educational system.

52. It was unfortunately true that low pay and the arduous nature of work in the social services made it difficult to keep good trained stafi whose experience was particularly valuable in such serious areas as child abuse in the family environment.

53. Mr. DAKERS (Belize) said that, nonetheless, social workers were currently better trained and better paid than in the past. An associate degree course in social work had been introduced in Belize which, it was hoped, would soon be awarded bachelor degree status. Although new legislation regarding the disabled was not yet on the statute books, their situation was indeed receiving greater attention.

54. NGOs existed to assist persons with visual or auditory disabilities, a Disability Division had been established within the Ministry of Human Development and a Special Education Unit was active both within and outside the educational system. Thought might fruitfully be given to reviving an organization such as the defunct Assembly of Persons with Disabilities, given that much was to be gained by pooling efforts.

55. Since the initial report of Belize had been submitted, considerable progress had been achieved in the treatment of young offenders. A new institution had been introduced to house first-time and juvenile offenders and thus ensure that they did not come into contact with hardened criminals. While the probation system, which had been in existence since the 1930s, had had a chequered history, it was currently being rendered more effective with the assistance of Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO). An expert in the field was introducing a scheme whereby young offenders carried out community service under supervision, as an alternative to confinement. A parole system had also been introduced, in keeping with the philosophy of seeking as far as possible to rehabilitate offenders within the community.

56. Ms. SHOMAN (Belize) said that Belize had not considered it necessary to accede to the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption since the national legislation prohibited adoption outside Belize. The entire question did, however, require urgent review. The Labour Act laid down strict age limits for the employment of young people, for which situations of national emergency constituted the sole exception. The participation of children in family-run agricultural, commercial or fishing activities was clearly defined, but the regulations were difficult to enforce.

57. Responding to Mrs. Karp's reservations regarding the term welfare, she said that Schedule 1 of the new Act accommodated not only children's best interests but also their wishes, feelings, needs and the potential effect of action. The emphasis on, for instance, taking children's views properly into account was demonstrated by the fact that every social welfare report must include interviews with the child involved, which were conducted in camera where appropriate.

58. Mr. DAKERS (Belize) said that high rates of truancy had long been a concern in Belize. While the Ministry of Human Development was not directly responsible for such matters, the fact that children frequently engaged in street-vending activities when they ought to be in school meant that the Ministry's social workers were frequently cast in the role of truancy officers. Many families were dependent on the income earned by children through such activities and the solution thus lay in finding alternative ways of boosting the family income and in persuading parents of the increasing importance of education.

59. Ms. BALDERAMOS GARCIA (Belize) emphasized the importance of counselling and of communication, not only with parents but also with members of the extended family, particularly in the case of parents working abroad for long periods.

60. Ms. SHOMAN (Belize), replying to Mr. Kolosov's concerns, said that there were absolutely no obstacles to freedom of information since even the most modest homes had access to 64 different cable television channels from the United States of America and Mexico. However, as a result, children were frequently exposed to unsuitable programmes and a danger existed that the national identity might be undermined through the insidious influence of foreign programmes. The Government was aware of the problem and the situation was under review by the Ministry of Culture which was considering ways of increasing national programming.

61. Mr. DAKERS (Belize) said that, although required to do so by law, people were reluctant to report cases of child abuse. However, the hotline established by the National Organization for the Prevention of Child Abuse, which was confidential in nature and manned by trained counsellors, had proved effective. In the past, people had also been discouraged by the insensitivity of police officers to such situations, for which reason a unit should be created within the Police Department staffed by officers with specialized training. Doctors had also been reluctant in the past to reflect the true extent of abuse in their medical reports and should be made aware that documented medical information was crucial if child abuse cases were to be successfully prosecuted.

62. The duration of a young person's stay in an institutional facility varied from one case to the next. The Ministry of Human Development, which was responsible for monitoring all such institutions, in both the public and private sectors, encouraged the earliest possible reunification with the family or placement with a foster or adoption family. Although the law was flexible, young people did not generally remain in such institutions beyond 16 or 17 years of age.

63. Ms. SHOMAN (Belize) said that, while there were grounds for concern regarding the fact that the duration of placement in an institutional facility was not specified, it was essential that the counselling process should be completed and it was not possible to anticipate how long that might take for individual children.

64. Mr. DAKERS (Belize) said that attention must also be paid to the child abuser, who was often waiting at home for the victim to return. The Department of Human Development had taken measures to provide counselling to such persons; the criminal legislation should also be reformed.

65. Ms. SHOMAN (Belize) said that the Ministry of Human Development envisaged invoking the Domestic Violence Act to create more programmes that would provide compulsory counselling to abusers.

66. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to ask questions regarding family environment and alternative care, basic health and welfare, and education, leisure and cultural activities.

67. Mrs. KARP said she noted that paragraph 28 of the initial report indicated that the legal minimum age for full-time employment was 14, and, for deprivation of liberty, 7. Clarifications would thus be welcome. She was pleased to learn that counselling was being provided to abusers. Belize might consider the use of behavioural therapy in combination with removal from the home; the desire to return home had been shown to be an incentive for change.

68. She said that the term "best interests of the child", which indicated protection and care combined with rights, was seen as having a broader scope than the term "welfare". That was therefore the term preferred by the Committee.

69. Mrs. MOKHUANE, noting that the legal minimum wage for hazardous employment was 14, inquired what measures, if any, had been taken to protect children engaged in such work. Furthermore, it would be preferable to use the term "children in difficult circumstances" rather than the term "truant", the situation being seen as a reaction to a set of circumstances rather than as meriting a behavioural label.

70. Mrs. PALME inquired whether studies had been conducted to determine how many Belizean mothers breastfed their babies. Reports showed that young children suffered from nutritional deficiencies, a problem that was often associated with the absence of breastfeeding, and that the child mortality rate was high. Commendably, Belize was participating in the UNICEF initiative to create baby-friendly hospitals, among the purposes of which was to encourage mothers to breastfeed their children. According to the World Health

Organization (WHO), Belize had a large number of nurses in comparison with other Latin American countries, although their numbers varied from region to region; they might perhaps be put to better use.

71. Interestingly, the report revealed that the school drop-out rate was high, a phenomenon also generally linked with the presence of malnutrition. Belize, which had a high rate of HIV infection, was also promoting educational programmes in reproductive health. Lastly, WHO was according significant attention to the development of an adolescent health support system, an initiative which could prove helpful to Belize.

72. Mrs. SARDENBERG asked what steps the Government was taking to cooperate with NGOs in the prevention and treatment of child abuse. It would also be useful to know whether bullying in schools was a problem, since it was a phenomenon often associated with corporal punishment and with a culture of violence in general. Had the Government developed mechanisms to address the problems of children with disabilities?

73. In the view of the Committee, it was not advisable to provide set terms for the institutionalization of children: article 25 of the Convention provided for periodic reviews of their treatment and placement. What was the main thrust of the Community and Parent Empowerment Project, discussed on page 17 of the written replies? Page 18 of the written replies stated that Belize was considering the establishment of a reciprocal international agreement on Maintenance Orders, and was, in that regard, contemplating adherence to the 1993 Hague Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions Relating to Maintenance Obligations. What stage had those deliberations reached?

74. Mr. FULCI, noting the high mortality rate among children under the age of five, said he had been surprised to find that there was no data available on the impact of oral rehydration therapy (ORT), a simple and inexpensive therapy which diminished the effects of malnutrition, prevented stunting, and saved lives. Incidentally, pharmaceutical companies were peddling much more complex, expensive and painful methods of achieving the same ends. Why did the report contain no mention of ORT?

75. Mrs. KARP, having asked what measures, if any, had been adopted to prohibit corporal punishment, said that, according to the initial report, the Government of Belize had put a great deal of effort into monitoring the formal adoption process. Since that was so, its permissive approach to the growing practice of informal adoption was most surprising. It should give serious consideration to conducting studies to assess the impact of informal adoption on children.

76. Had the Government developed a comprehensive strategy for coping with HIV/AIDS? The previous year, the Committee had held a day of discussion on how countries might best cope with that pandemic; its deliberations might prove useful to Belize. It would also be useful to know what measures had been taken to combat the high rate of child pregnancy and whether abortion was permitted in Belize. How were pregnant girls treated by society? Were they required to leave school? What services were available to assist them?

77. Turning to the matter of child abuse, she said that the relevant legislation should be amended in order to provide assistance to the victim throughout the legal process, including, inter alia, the use of investigators with psychological training in the treatment of child victims, and special protection techniques like the use of video monitors for the presentation of testimony.

78. Mrs. MBOI said that the practice of informal adoption was common in many countries, including her own. She agreed that studies should be conducted to assess the well-being of informally adopted children, with a view to developing measures to protect their welfare and promote their rights.

79. The Government of Belize had made commendable progress in the area of health but many grave problems still remained. It was interesting to note, for example, that malnutrition was more common among male children than among female children. Studies should be undertaken with a view to developing a comprehensive nutritional policy that would address the needs of special groups.

80. Although the initial report cited a number of significant adolescent health problems, including HIV infection and substance abuse, it had neglected to mention suicide, which, according to WHO, was especially high in girls between the ages of 11 and 21. Had any research been carried out to determine the reason? Apparently about half of all deaths of children between the ages of 5 and 19 were attributable to external causes; what measures, if any, had been undertaken to prevent such deaths?

81. The statistics also indicated that adolescents were suffering from many problems related to their sexuality. They were serious but preventable problems. Had the Government of Belize considered engaging the active participation of religious leaders in the effort to reduce morbidity and mortality in children? In many countries, a pregnant girl was suspended from school, but the boy who had fathered the child was permitted to continue his studies. Belize should contemplate prohibiting that practice. In any event, it was clear that priority must be given to health programmes and services for adolescents.

82. Mrs. PALME said that UNICEF had recently emphasized the importance of early intellectual stimulation for children. There were, however, few day-care centres and pre-school programmes in Belize. The Government should, perhaps, consider the possibility of requesting the churches to set up cultural groups for young parents, an inexpensive but effective means of promoting child development, disseminating health information, and encouraging the participation of fathers. Nurses might also be asked to assist in the creation of parents' groups, and to provide them with health-related information.

83. The CHAIRPERSON said that misbehaviour by male youths was a significant problem throughout the Caribbean region. Had the Government of Belize sponsored any research into the relationship between violence in the family and the problems of boys in society?

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.